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Tacoma, WA - December 20, 2005

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An SOS for Puget Sound

BY SUSAN GORDON; The News Tribune Published: December 20th, 2005 02:30 AM

Gov. Christine Gregoire on Monday said she'll ask the Legislature to put a \$42 million down payment on a master plan to restore the health of the Puget Sound by 2020.

"I want us to ramp it up," she said at a Seattle press conference staged with fog-bound Elliott Bay as a backdrop.

Puget Sound might look pretty, but beneath the surface, pollution, toxic contaminants and raw sewage threaten the region's health and economy, Gregoire

Her proposed spending plan is part of a budget package she will present to the 2006 Legislature. Most of the revenue to pay for the plan would be drawn from taxes generated by the state's Model Toxics Control Act. That is Washington's version of Superfund, which taxes hazardous substances.

Because the state's oil refineries account for most of the revenue, this year's collections were unexpectedly buoyed by the rise in oil prices, said Jim Cahill, the governor's senior budget assistant.

The windfall was not anticipated, so the revenue is not being diverted from other projects, he said.

The only money specifically earmarked for the South Sound is \$3.4 million to the Port of Tacoma. It would help pay for restoration work at Pier 25, where contaminated sediments along Hylebos Waterway are being capped as part of the continuing Commencement Bay Superfund cleanup.

Puget Sound's resident orca whales are in danger of extinction and, despite 20 years of effort, the Sound's problems are getting worse, not better, the governor said.

She declared she will not permit the dead zones that have overcome the Hood Canal to destroy other parts of the Sound.

"I am not going to allow that to happen on my watch," Gregoire said.

Even so, efforts to clean up the Sound require citizen support, not just government backing, she said.



DREW PERINE/THE NEWS TRIBUNE

With the Olympic Mountains as a majestic background, a tug and barge navigate Puget Sound near Steilacoom on Saturday. As pristine as the Sound might look, pollution beneath the surface threatens the region's health, Gov. Christine Gregoire said Monday in announcing a \$42 million restoration proposal.



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1 of 3 12/20/2005 11:26 AM To that end, she announced the creation of a special nine-member task force, called the Puget Sound Partnership, to set goals, benchmarks and timetables for the recovery plan. Members include elected officials and representatives of state business, agriculture, shellfish, environmental advocacy and tribal groups. The panel's report is due in October.

U.S. Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Belfair), who has spearheaded Hood Canal revival efforts and will serve on the Partnership, said he expects Gregoire's announcement will become a "turning point for Puget Sound and the Hood Canal."

He said the conservation of the Sound merits the kind of national attention paid to the restoration of the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay, where significant amounts of federal money have been allocated.



As for Gregoire's immediate spending plan, about half the money – \$21.6 million – would be used to speed cleanup of contaminated sediments. Another \$1.9 million would pay for oil spill prevention materials and response.

The plan also includes money to restore estuaries and salmon habitat; replace failing wastewater treatment systems at six state parks; lend homeowners money to replace failing septic systems; remove creosote-treated logs; and help local governments reduce stormwater runoff.

Gregoire said the region's booming human population is one reason the Sound is suffering.

Some environmental activists say what's needed is a curb on development to ensure conservation. But Gregoire said she's reluctant to force new regulations on people who haven't yet been enlisted in the effort to save the Sound.

"We could do a lot of mandates and get a lot of push back or come together and figure out the right thing to do," she said.

Billy Frank Jr., a Nisqually Indian who is chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, is among Gregoire's Puget Sound Partnership appointees. In echoing Gregoire's call for attention to the Sound's needs, he compared it to the nest of a pair of eagles that live near his home.

"This Puget Sound is our nest, all of our nests, and it's asking for help right now," Frank said.

Gregoire also asked Bill Ruckelshaus, the former Environmental Protection Agency administrator and chairman of the state Salmon Recovery Board, to serve on the task force. He commended her initiative.

"Too many measures of Puget Sound's health point in the wrong direction," he said. It will continue to deteriorate, "if we don't manage growth in an intelligent way."

Ruckelshaus also said he believes lessons can be learned from failed efforts to heal the Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay, Florida's Everglades and San Francisco Bay.

A permanent solution for the Sound will likely entail decades of effort, he said. "In short, it will take a miracle," he said. "But the miracle that is Puget Sound demands one."

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What's next

- Gov. Christine Gregoire presents her spending plan to the Legislature, which convenes Jan. 9.
- A new commission, the Puget Sound Partnership, begins meeting in January to come with a plan to recover health of Puget Sound by 2020.
- Gregoire wants the plan submitted to her by October.

About the proposal

- An additional \$42 million by mid-2007 would clean up portions of the Puget Sound and prevent future oil spills and pollution.
- Most would come from taxes on hazardous substances under the state's Model Toxics Control Act; oil
 refineries account for most of it.
- A committee called the Puget Sound Partnership would map out a plan to make the Sound healthy by 2020.

Members of Puget Sound Partnership

- William Ruckelshaus, former federal Environmental Protection Agency administrator and Salmon Recovery Board chairman
- U.S. Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Belfair)
- Billy Frank Jr., Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
- Colin Moseley, Simpson Resource Co. chairman and chairman of the Washington Business Roundtable
- Ron Sims, King County executive
- Mark Emmert, University of Washington president
- Mike Shelby, Western Washington Agricultural Association executive director
- Bill Taylor, Taylor Shellfish Farms vice president
- Kathy Fletcher, People for Puget Sound executive director

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